

## Butterflies in Tuscany, May—June 1973

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The Peninsula of Italy is always an attraction for anyone interested in its lepidoptera and as I pointed out in an earlier paper (*Ent. Rec.*, 1970: 82: 249-252) on a visit to this region, it seems unfortunate that not more entomologists delve into the large areas, especially in the Apennine range, which still seem to have been somewhat neglected.

I had a further opportunity of collecting in this fine country when Mr Hugh Johnson who used to live in England sent me a most cordial invitation to stay with him on the estate of his wife's family situated some 15 miles west of the ancient city of Perugia. Accordingly I flew to Rome on 25th May where I picked up a Renault and drove from there direct via the Autostrada just over a 100 miles to Passignano and thence to the nearby fine and ancient house on the estate of le Masse which overlooks Lake Trasimene. It was altogether a most delightful resort where I was warmly greeted by my host who said there had just been a very bad break in the weather. However, it did indeed relent the next day, the 26th, when I went in quest of the local lepidoptera. I could soon assess that the area with its wooded slopes above the garden was rich in many species. The most noticeable and plentiful butterfly seemed to be the Lycaenid *Glaucopsyche alexis* Poda which was in abundance in the immediate vicinity of the house. Both sexes were flying in long herbage together with a good many *Melitaea didyma* Esp., while the lower slopes harboured by an orchard a small colony of *Melitaea cinxia* L., just freshly emerged. *Pieris rapae* L. and *P. napi* L. were much in evidence together with *Anthocharis cardamines* L. *Papilio machaon* L. was careering about at great speed in the garden. The next day which was very warm, I ventured uphill along a path through a thickly wooded area where *Leptidia sinapis* L. and *Clossiana euphrosyne* L. were disporting themselves. *Maniola jurtina* L. was just appearing. That afternoon my host drove me to some ground above the estate where I took the Burnet *Zygaena oxytropis* Bdv., a species confined to Italy. In the evening there was quite a concourse of moths at his front door light which included *Arctia villica* L. and *Eilema caniola* Hübn. as well as the diminutive Cossid *Dyspressa ulula* Borkh. and the outsize Galleriid Pyrale *Larioria anella* Schiff. May 28 was yet another very warm day which produced further *M. cinxia* and a single *Heodes alciphron gordius* Sulzer. May 29 was the only completely wet one during the whole of my sojourn and in fact I did not see any more considerable rain before I left Italy well into June.

Unfortunately I had to curtail my visit to this lovely part of Tuscany as my host had to move to Perugia where his wife was unwell. I had had the opportunity of sampling its lepidoptera and recorded 19 species of butterflies on the Le Masse

estate in the five days.

A small butterfly in which I was particularly interested was the little Satyrid *Coenonympha corinna* Hübn., chiefly an inhabitant of Corsica and Sardinia but which produces a very specialised form *elbana* Staudinger on the island of Elba and on a limited area on the western coast of Italy opposite Elba, which I made tentative plans to visit. But I found most of the island had been booked up for conferences just at that period so that my alternative choice was the small town of Orbetello on the mainland opposite the mountainous Peninsula of Monte Argentario. I was fortunate in being able to book up here in spite of an impending national holiday, as this area was also a well-known one for *elbana*.

I left le Masse early on May 30 and motored via Siena through some grand country to Grosseto. That evening I reached my destination 100 miles away which was on the coast at the neck of the Peninsula. Grand weather prevailed the last day of May when I ventured across the causeway from Orbetello to the foot of the very rugged Monte Argentario rising to over 2000 ft.

I soon spotted a rough track into the foothills which was being used by lorries leading to the local rubbish dump. At once I could see the area was full of butterflies. Immediately I pulled up I spotted a small satyrid which I netted and it proved to be *elbana* which is much more heavily spotted on both the under- and upperside than its Corsican relative from which it differs so much that it may well claim specific rank. In 1969, Lt. Col. W. Manley found this insect slightly further up the coast northwards on another small peninsula of Talamone (*Entomologist's Rec. J. Var.*, **81**: 120). Other species seen on this first day included *Gonepteryx cleopatra* L., *Limenitis reducta* Staud., *Euchloë ausonia* Hübn and also the handsome day flying arctiid moth *Coscinia striata* L. That afternoon produced a few more *elbana* which seemed scarce at this moment. However, June which opened very warm produced some more of the little insect in this spot which proved very fruitful. It was on the edge of a *maquis*-type of vegetation which covered most of the seven mile long eastern face of mountainside with dense scrub. It was full of bushes of *Arbutus unedo* so that I had high hopes of the appearance of *Charaxes jasius* L. in due course and I was not to be disappointed. *Papilio machaon* L. was quite numerous but hard to get in prime condition. I took a single male *Pyronia cecilia* Vall., the only one I saw. On the road to Porto San Stefano I discovered a well-made route which wound up to a big monastery and then continued several miles to the summit of Monte Argentario where there was a big radar station and a grand view of the surrounding country. The whole road which cut through the thick *maquis* had plenty of flowers along the edges which harboured on subsequent days a lot of butterflies and was to be my chief hunting ground. A further visit to these localities

on June 3 saw the appearance of the first *Mellicta athalia* Rott., and a very bright form of *Plebicula escheri* Hüb. approaching f. *splendens* Stefanelli. On the 4th owing to reconstruction work at my hotel at Orbetello I moved to the very good Hotel Don Pedro, some five miles away at the small town of Porto Ercole on the south side of the Peninsula. It was really a most delightful location, overlooking the little harbour full of boats rather like one on the Cornish coast. A new road led for some three miles towards the west of the Mountain but it was not possible to make the complete circuit owing to a very rough stretch in this region which was also very wild and full of flowers but not nearly as rich in lepidoptera as the slopes already mentioned. Except for one night thunderstorm it had continued very warm conditions for the following week during which I concentrated on the fauna of the Peninsula, and enjoyed a very refreshing daily bathe on the excellent sandy beach at La Feniglia quite close to Porto Ercole.

June 6 after the storm saw a burst of butterflies with large numbers of *C. cleopatra* and the first of that prevalent Hairstreak *Nordmannia ilicis* Esp. mainly up the Monastery road where *C. elbana* was hugging the roadside in many places. On the 7th on this road, as I pulled up, I saw a large butterfly sail over the car and had no difficulty in identifying it as Europe's largest butterfly *Charaxes jasius* L. The next two days in this area saw a further emergence of most of the spring butterflies already referred to. On the 10th I was relaxing eating by my car when a *jasius* glided along only two feet from the ground about 10.30 a.m. just out of reach, a fine sight the mélange of black and red of the upperside. Later that day I saw at least three others with one settling on a tall bush up the Monastery road, but it flew off as I was stalking it. By this time both *elbana*, the Hairstreak and Brimstone had become almost abundant at intervals along this rich winding route of some four miles. I spent my last collecting day June 11, scrutinising every stretch of it in the hope of seeing more *jasius* but in vain and none patronised some banana bait I put down in a ride. However, I happened to come across a large bramble patch smothered mainly with *N. ilicis* (at least fifty) and a goodly assortment of other species with some eight *Limenitis reducta* and a good many *M. athalia*, *C. elbana* (first females), and a lot of late *Celastrina argiolus* L. *Maniola jurtina* L. was also enjoying the feast at these blossoms.

On the 12th of June I motored in brilliant sunshine to Rome Airport where I embarked by air in the early afternoon and was back in England the same evening after a most enjoyable and on the whole successful stay in this delightful part of Italy, though of course it was a chagrin that my catch did not include any *Charaxes*.

I have enumerated below the species of butterflies noted (38 in all). In the list (P) stands for Passignano district, while (MA) indicates Monte Argentario.

- Papilio machaon* L. Few (P) and more numerous (MA).  
*Iphiclides podalirius* L. Only two seen (MA).  
*Pieris brassicae* L. Few appearing end of visit (MA).  
*Pieris rapae* L. Numerous both (P) and (MA).  
*Pieris manni* Mayer. A few (MA).  
*Pieris napi* L. Plentiful in a summer form (P) and (MA).  
*Pontia daplidice* L. Only one seen and taken (MA).  
*Euchloë ausonia* Hübn. Several in a summer form (MA).  
*Anthocharis cardamines* L. Fairly numerous (P).  
*Colias crocea* Fourc. Only seen at (P).  
*Gonepteryx cleopatra* L. Very numerous after June 6 (MA).  
*Leptidea sinapis* L. A few noted in woods (P).  
*Charaxes jasius* L. Some eight sightings from June 7.  
*Limenitis reducta* Staud. Fairly numerous everywhere (MA).  
*Clossiana euphrosyne* L. A few in woods (P).  
*Melitaea cinxia* L. A few seen (P).  
*Melitaea phoebe* Schiff. Only one noted (MA).  
*Melitaea didyma* Esp. A few (P) and more numerous (MA).  
*Mellicta athalia* Rott. Fairly plentiful (MA).  
*Melanargia galatea* L. A few observed from June 2 (MA).  
*Maniola jurtina* L. Numerous (P) and (MA).  
*Pyronia cecilia* Vall. Only one seen (MA).  
*Coenonympha pamphilus* L. Fairly plentiful at (P) and (MA).  
*Coenonympha corinna elbana* Staud. First seen on May 31  
 and quite numerous by June 11 when females first seen  
 (MA).  
*Pararge aegeria* L. A few noted (P).  
*Lasiommata megera* L. A number seen (P) also (MA).  
*Nordmannia ilicis* Esp. Plentiful from June 6 (MA).  
*Callophrys rubi* L. A few late specimens (P).  
*Heodes alciphron* Rott. One taken (P).  
*Celastrina argiolus* L. A number noted in most areas on (MA).  
*Glaucopsyche alexis* Poda. Plentiful (P), less numerous (MA).  
*Plebicula escheri* Hübn. A few noted on June 3 (MA).  
*Polyommatus icarus* Rott. Several seen (P) and (MA).  
*Pyrgus malvoides* Edwards. A few seen (P).  
*Thymelicus acteon* Rott. Numerous everywhere (MA).  
*Thymelicus sylvestris* Poda. A few seen (MA).  
*Thymelicus lineola* Ochs. Scarce on (MA).  
*Ochlodes venatus* Esp. A few observed (MA).

The following moths were identified at light and in the vicinity of le Masse, Passignano.

ARCTIIDAE:—*Arctia villica* L., *Hippocrita jacobaeae* L., *Diacrisia sannio* L., *Eilema caniola* Hübn.

NOCTUIDAE:—*Hadena lepida* Esp., *Unca tripartita* Hufn.

GEOMETRIDAE:—*Sterrha vulpinaria* H.-S., *Sterrha subsericeata* Haworth, *Rhodostronia calabra* Pet., *Anaitis plagiata* L., *Cleora rhomboidaria* Schiff., *Rhoptria asperaria* Hübn., *Ematurqa atomaria orientaria* Sulz.

COSSIDAE:—*Dussoressa ulula* Borkh. GALLERIINAE:—*Lamoria anella* Schiff. ZYGAENIDAE:—*Zygaena oxytropis* Bdv.